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Senate panel to call CIA workers in closed probe of Iran arms deal

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The Senate Intelligence Committee probably will call at least a half-dozen current and former CIA employees to testify in closed hearings beginning today on Iranian arms sales, the committee's chairman said in an interview televised yesterday.

"We're probably going to call six or eight or more current or past members of the Central Intelligence Agency because there's no one person who knows all the facts of their involvement," Sen. David Durenberger, Minnesota Republican, said on "John McLaughlin's One on One" program that was taped Friday evening and aired yesterday.

Three committees — the House and Senate intelligence panels and House Foreign Affairs — had already begun inquiries into the Iran arms deal prior to the disclosures that profits from the arms sales aided the Nicaraguan resistance.

So far, none of the committees has taken sworn testimony, but Mr. Durenberger said witnesses at his hearings would be under oath starting today.

"Practically all of the people who have already been named as being involved in this case will be part of that investigation," he said.

But asked if White House Chief of Staff Donald Regan would testify, he said, "Donald Regan is not, no."

Among the officials likely to be called are CIA Director William

Casey, Lt. Col. Oliver North, and former National Security Advisers John Poindexter and Robert McFarlane, according to sources.

Mr. Casey represented the administration at Nov. 21 briefings at both the intelligence panels. Mr. Casey reportedly told the panels of the CIA's role in setting up a Swiss bank account for Iranian arms payments, but said nothing to link that account to the Nicaraguan rebels.

"The precise involvement of the CIA may not be totally known to Bill Casey, although I suspect that with a few reminders it will," Mr. Durenberger said.

Mr. Durenberger also said he thought Mr. Reagan "was kept in the dark on the details" of the transactions.

The Associated Press quoted congressional aides yesterday as saying Mr. McFarlane and Mr. North may have misled congressional intelligence committees in the past by denying in classified but unsworn testimony that Mr. North helped provide military assistance to Nicaraguan rebels.

However, Sen. Orrin Hatch, Utah Republican and a member of the Senate Intelligence Committee, said he believes no senior administration officials knew about the transfer of money to the Nicaraguan resistance.

"There was a Swiss bank account," Mr. Hatch said in an interview. "But I haven't seen any evidence yet that any money was transferred to the resistance."

The House Foreign Affairs Com-

mittee already has scheduled closed meetings with several high-ranking administration officials in early December.

On Friday, that committee wrote President Reagan asking for a wide range of documents, including papers relating to a secret order signed by Mr. Reagan last Jan. 17 detailing the arms deal and ordering Mr. Casey to keep the information from Congress.

"The manner in which the whole affair was conducted has seriously jeopardized our foreign policy, this nation's credibility and our efforts to combat terrorism around the world," wrote committee Chairman Dante Fascell, Florida Democrat.

Also on Friday, the House Judiciary criminal justice subcommittee released a report supporting the panel's recent call for appointment of an independent counsel to investigate possible violations of U.S. laws.

The subcommittee, headed by Rep. John Conyers, Michigan Democrat, first asked Attorney General Edwin Meese III to name an independent counsel in October, shortly after American Eugene Hasenfus was shot down in a cargo plane over Nicaragua.

In a letter to the attorney general last week, Mr. Conyers said: "Your closeness to the president, your prior involvement in approving the arms transfers to Iran, your alleged involvement in planning the private Contra aid effort, and your statement on Tuesday that 'every member of the administration owes it to

the president to stand shoulder-to-shoulder with him,' create the appearance of a conflict of interest on your part."

At the Justice Department, spokesman Patrick Korten said it was "too early" in the department's full-scale investigation to name an independent counsel.

The panel report cited seven possible violations of laws that may have occurred in the funneling of funds from the Iran arms sales to the Nicaraguan resistance, including misuse of public money, property or records; fraud and false statements; false or fictitious claims; violating a ban on spending money for unauthorized purposes; conspiracy to defraud; failing to report a felony; and obstruction of justice.